

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Aquathin Corporation

Florida Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Continuous Improvement and Certifications Help Aquathin® Filter Out the Competition

Client Profile:

AQUATHIN® has been producing extremely efficient, water purification systems from their facility in Pompano Beach, Florida for over 27 years. These highly effective systems use reverse osmosis and deionization to produce the finest quality filtered water for home, commercial, military, medical and laboratory use. AQUATHIN® currently holds several patents and continues to be an innovator in their industry. They are a highly regarded manufacturer and distributor of over 70 water purification products, having received numerous certifications and awards, including the United States Highest Award for Export Excellence the Presidents E Award. AQUATHIN® has distributors all across the United States and in 34 countries around the world. The Florida facility employs 20 people.

Situation:

AQUATHIN® has always been one to raise the bar. That began in 1980 when they decided to produce the most effective water purification system available. As time has passed the company realized that they needed to be flexible and creative in the way they do business in order to remain competitive. They have continued to make improvements as the company grows and have always had their own, very good, quality system in place. This has played an important role in their success. Alfred Lipshultz, AQUATHIN® President, had heard of the Florida Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Florida MEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate, through his membership on the Florida District Export Council and decided to contact the Florida MEP for assistance with the CE Mark certification process. The CE Mark is a European conformity marking like the ISO Quality Certification. Obtaining the CE Mark would allow AQUATHIN® access to the European trade and would keep them ahead of the competition in this area. They also wanted to obtain their ISO 9001:2000 Certification, and knew that having these would help bring their business to the next level.

Solution:

Florida MEP project managers, Enrique Bekerman and Wilhelm Barb, had been working with AQUATHIN® for the past few years. Initially, Enrique met with Mr. Lipshultz, discussed his company's needs and identified areas where Florida MEP could provide assistance. Enrique told them of training grant funds through Workforce Florida which he then helped AQUATHIN® apply for. Subsequently, they were awarded a grant which covered a majority of the training costs for the projects. Florida MEP brought in assistance from CITRA (Center for International Trade Regulation Assistance) of Duquesne University in Pennsylvania which has expertise in dealing with European Union regulations. They made sure that AQUATHIN® products were compliant to the CE Mark requirements for quality and performance and then assisted them in putting together appropriate documentation. When they were about three quarters of the way done with the CE Mark work, they decided to proceed with their ISO 9001:2000 application as well, since much of the documentation and many processes were similar. Wilhelm Barb was able to work with the fine quality system that AQUATHIN® already had in place to assist the company in fulfilling the specifications for applying for their ISO certification.

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In less than a year, AQUATHIN® was awarded both of these certifications, advancing them to a new level of doing business to international standards used around the world and keeping them ahead of the competition.

Enrique recognized that AQUATHIN® was already utilizing many lean concepts in the way they conducted their business. Instead of offering traditional lean training to AQUATHIN® employees, Florida MEP decided to tailor make a two-day session for the entire staff. The program reviewed the basic lean principles and primarily taught them how to conduct Value Stream Mapping and use Kaizen to look at their processes and make improvements. Value Stream Mapping (VSM) examines the current state of a process and maps it from start to finish. The ideal future state is determined and then you decide what needs to be done to bring you from current to future state. The problems are identified and then solutions are put into place during the Kaizen events. Lipshultz was very pleased with these exercises and with the Lean tools they now have. He said that they used the VSM to examine the AQUALITE line of products and identified several steps that could be removed completely by simply having some components modified at their suppliers. AQUATHIN® worked with these suppliers and with a few tooling changes, they were able to save valuable steps and improve their efficiency in the assembly process. AQUATHIN® plans to do additional Kaizen events for other product lines.

Results:

- * Earned CE Mark and ISO 9001:2000 certification.
- * Increased sales per employee by \$250,000.
- * Anticipated new clients/markets.
- * Achieved a more competitive and profitable position.

Testimonial:

"Without Enrique and Wilhelm of the Florida Manufacturing Extension Partnership, we would never have completed the certification process. In fact, I just contacted Wilhelm to come back in to give us some guidance on our internal auditing for ISO 9000:2001. AQUATHIN® considers Enrique and Wilhelm solid members of our resource team and we look forward to continuing our relationship with Florida MEP."

Alfred Lipshultz, President